ELECTORAL POLITICS IN INDIAN PUNJAB: A NEW PHASE?

Ashutosh Kumar

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, PANJAB UNIVERSITY, CHANDIGARH, INDIA

ABSTRACT The forthcoming Assembly elections in Punjab in early 2017 indicate signs of a new phase in the electoral history of this state, largely dominated earlier by various political alliances headed by the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) under Jat Sikh leadership. Presented within the wider Indian electoral landscape, this article offers an analytical overview of Punjab's electoral politics as it has evolved since partition from the vantage point of SAD. It is argued that there are several good reasons why traditional SAD domination and style of leadership are presently being challenged through a combination of new political actors and, significantly, changing awareness among a very diverse electorate about what to expect from any government one elects.

Introduction

This article first presents, within the wider Indian context (Pai, 2000), a descriptive and analytical overview of the electoral politics of Punjab since partition, from the vantage point of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the oldest surviving state-level political party in India. The article illustrates that despite being primarily concerned with the political and sociocultural causes of the rural Sikh community in the state and elsewhere, SAD has probably been the only state-level party in India that has played a colossal role in long-term shaping of the political dynamics of a state.[1] Arguably, if India's electoral politics in the first four/five decades revolved around Congress, in Punjab SAD has been the main force behind different phases of state politics, moving from Sikh panthic agenda to an agenda for peace and Hindu–Sikh harmony to the present good governance agenda. Further uniqueness of SAD among the old and new

state-level parties lies in the fact that, ever since its inception in 1920, the party has self-righteously claimed to be the custodian of the Sikh community's religious and cultural interests, not only in Punjab or in India, but worldwide. Historically, SAD led the Punjabi Suba Movement for carving out a Sikh majority state in post-partition India, largely on a linguistic basis. After achieving this, in 1966, SAD fought for more autonomy from the federal centre, which however generated secessionist extremism and horrific violence.

After receding into political oblivion during the militancy period, the party, under the moderate leadership of five-times Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, has been instrumental in affecting a critical shift in the state's electoral politics, with a secular agenda of development and governance replacing the earlier religio-ethnic focus. As a panthic party, SAD has so far managed to retain its core constituency of rural Sikhs, especially the numerically significant landholding Jat Sikhs. However, SAD has also increasingly reached out to Dalits and urban caste-Hindus to broaden its support base and lessen dependence on its long-term ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Once a cadre-based, ideologically driven party with a collective leadership that emerged from grassroots/gurdwara politics, SAD has since the militancy days suffered steady decline on all counts. In its new avatar of panthic agent-cum-regional party connected to the national mainstream, the party now faces stiff challenges, both from the debutant Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and its old rival, Congress, in the forthcoming 2017 Assembly elections.

After a century of existence and recovering from near-complete political oblivion during militancy in the 1980s and early 1990s, which it was unable to negotiate, SAD has weakened itself by compromising on its panthic or communitarian agenda, losing its steady hold on Punjab's Sikh electorate (Jodhka, 2000a: 882). The political leadership's conscious efforts to undermine the two other pillars of Sikh politics, the spiritual/religious Sikh authority of the Akal Takht, and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in search of unbridled hold over panthic politics have hurt the party. To become a winning party, SAD has been in alliance with the BJP, whose Hindutva orientation takes a diametrically opposed position on some Akali core agenda. Presently in power for an unprecedented uninterrupted two terms, SAD has further weakened itself by sidetracking on issues of agrarian crisis, either blaming Congress, which used to be in power at the centre, or indulging in reckless populism, which has further worsened the situation. This article examines, ultimately, to what extent the recent emergence of the AAP as a new electoral competitor now provides further challenges to SAD, its diminishing traditional social support base, political significance and style of party leadership. The emergent scenario promises significant elements of innovation and hope, especially for less corruption and more sustained stability in Punjab, as well as more involvement of the numerically strong but continuously disadvantaged Dalit population.

Federalising India as an Electoral Laboratory

The newly acquired significance of the states in federal India's political set-up has arisen largely because of political articulation and electoral mobilisation of the voting masses, focused predominantly around primordial identities, especially in the last three decades. Since newly mobilised identity groups are often territorially concentrated or confined to a particular region/sub-region within a state, mobilisation for electoral purposes often occurs at the state/sub-state level. This phenomenon largely explains the emergence of the Indian states as critical units for electoral analysis.[2]

While this does not mean that India's central state and its electoral patterns have become irrelevant locally, this shift of development towards states, regions and local concerns has strengthened state-level parties. Mostly formed and led by leaders from newly mobilised and numerically strong castes and communities, this has allowed them to score over polity-wide parties, as state parties and their leaders are more closely connected to 'their' people and often more successful in activating sectarian, ethnic and populist voter linkages. In this way, state parties have frequently been able to develop a core constituency. In Punjab, clearly SAD has acted as representative of the landholding, numerically significant Jat Sikh community.

Since one also witnesses 'the consolidation of the non-Congress space as well as the decline of the Congress and, in some states, fragmentation of the state level party system' (Sridharan, 2014: 23), this further helps state parties to gain prominence. Particularly if a state's party system is fragmented and social cleavages have become politicised, as has occurred in Punjab, local factors become crucial electoral concerns. In this context, Yadav (1996: 95) refers to the beginning of a competitive multi-party system, no longer defined with reference to Congress, reflected in Assembly election outcomes of 16 states in the early 1990s. Congress was forced to 'transform itself from the dominant party in a dominant party system to a competitive party in a multi-party system' (Rudolph & Rudolph, 2008: 36). In Punjab, however, Congress was never the dominant or hegemonic party, either in an electoral or ideological sense.

The rise of state-level parties also reflects the ongoing process of 'federalisation' of India's party system, most visibly in Bihar, Punjab, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. Also witnessed in Haryana and Orissa recently, state-level parties have become dominant partners in coalition arrangements, with national parties relegated to junior partner status. Actually, the BJP has adopted this electoral route to register its presence in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa, where it had to start from scratch. In Punjab, the BJP has made gains as a junior SAD ally, but has been unable to become a winning party on its own. A weakened and therefore coalitionable Congress adopted the same route of late in Bengal and Bihar, eschewing its pride to remain electorally relevant. Notably, the two polity-wide parties have started focusing more on state and regional issues during their campaigns, as their respective state units gain prominence.

The newly exalted position of states and state-level parties in India has also brought focus on the considerable power and influence wielded by state-level political leaders.

Reminiscent of the Nehru era, state party bosses have again become instrumental in shaping the form and content of party agenda and the tenor of election campaigns, especially if they are the party's founder leader, now also seen in Telangana (Benbabaali, 2016). They decide important matters of alliance building, ticket distribution and modes of distribution of patronage. This resurgence of state leaders means that the politics of patronage and clientelism have increasingly become localised and leader-centric, unlike in the Congress era (Chandra, 2004). Castes and communities acting as political/voting categories tend to cling to 'their' parties and leaders, not only for a feel-good factor, but also in the realistic hope of benefitting from direct/indirect transfers of public resources (Ahuja & Chhibber, 2012).

Another factor adding to growing power and influence of the territorial/ethnic state-level parties and their bosses, or even state leaders of polity-wide parties, concerns the sheer size of territory and population of some Indian states. The scale of their economies allows winning state-level parties and their leaders access to massive political resources in terms of organisation, money and votes. When such leader figures change alliances, the enigmatic crystal balls of the electoral system become even more unpredictable. The newly found importance of states, state-level parties and their leadership makes it imperative to develop a coherent theoretical framework for comparative study of state-level electoral politics. Such attempts have long been discouraged, mainly on the ground that, because of the ongoing de-centring of India's polity and economy, each state is of late showing distinct models and patterns of party system and electoral behaviour. As a result, fluidity in the nature of electoral permutations and combinations involving various parties and their leadership at the state level made a broad-brush analysis difficult.

An alternative, better approach would be to view the world's largest electoral federal democracy as providing a laboratory-like situation. This allows studying the emergent nature of electoral politics and party systems as they acquire distinct state/region-specific characteristics under the same electoral system, while polity-wide parties compete with state-based parties for power, both at state and federal levels. This approach allows exploration of commonalities across states, even as some exceptions are underlined. Among important commonalities, captured in recent academic literature, several features are now visible across Indian states (Yadav & Palshikar, 2008). Apart from the growing presence of state-level parties, their leadership and federalisation of the party system, the emergence of geographic, historical-cultural regions as electoral regions is prominent, giving rise to the assertion of newly mobilised identity groups as voting categories and the emergence of electoral bipolarity either as two-party systems or two-plus bipolar systems.

Contextualising Punjab

The borderland state of Indian Punjab is no exception to these state-level trends, most of which have been visible since partition. First, with the deepening of democratic

consciousness, the three geographically distinct and socio-historically constituted regions of Malwa, Doaba and Majha have long emerged as electoral regions in present-day Punjab. Each has its own specificities of politics and leadership that come to play particularly in Assembly elections.[3] Second, there is a historical legacy of politicisation and mobilisation of social cleavages in the state for electoral purposes. Social distinctions based on caste, kinship, region, language, script and religion have remained important, sometimes latent factors, shaping the complex dynamics of party competition and electoral behaviour since colonial days. Third, since the state's linguistic reorganisation in 1966, Punjab has been witness to coalitional pre-electoral alliances involving both Congress and SAD. Congress in alliance with the Left parties or alone has been pitted against the SAD–BJP electoral alliance since 1997 (see Tables 1 and 2). Even before, there were attempts to secure electoral alliances, though they remained short lived.

Hence, in the late 1960s, SAD was in alliance with the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), followed by an alliance with the now defunct Janata Party. In 1980, the party unsuccessfully contested the Assembly elections in alliance with the CPI–CPM (Singh, 2014). Over time, Punjab has witnessed an emerging federalisation of the party system, with SAD, a state-level party, as the dominant partner in all its coalition arrangements with national parties. Symptomatic of this trend, the Congress state unit has been vocal in raising state-specific issues in elections, sometimes even going against the party's national leadership. For example, in 2004, the Congress government led by Amarinder Singh was instrumental in getting the Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004 passed by the State Legislative Assembly without concurrence of the party high command. The Congress state unit decision, contrary to the position of the national party leadership, highlights the growing autonomy of the state unit and its state-level leadership. While Amarinder Singh was removed as the party state unit president after the 2012 electoral debacle, he reclaimed the position in 2016, openly threatening a reluctant party high command to break away from the party. The issue of sharing Punjab's waters with neighbouring states figures prominently in the run-up to the 2017 elections, taken up by SAD and the Congress state unit. For this reason, Haryana-based Congress leaders are not expected to campaign in Punjab.[4]

For comparativists, the exceptionalism of Punjab has been particularly evident in one crucial respect. Most north Indian states, following the footsteps of South India (Wyatt, 2010), have witnessed a 'silent revolution' (Jaffrelot, 2003), as political power is 'being transferred, on the whole peacefully, from the upper caste elites to various subaltern groups' (Jaffrelot, 2003: 494). Following a remarkable democratic upsurge, turnout in Assembly elections across all states in India now touches around 70 per cent, up from around 60 per cent in the 1990s, with Punjab being no exception.[5] Yet the politics of Punjab has remained lopsided in terms of contesting/altering the socio-economic basis of power in Punjab, which continues to rest with landholding elites, despite the sizable presence of Dalits and Backward Castes (Judge, 2012: 18).[6] Over the years, an increasing level of entrenchment of political power in the hands of a few political families cutting across party lines is observable. Typically, these families enter

Table 1. **Summary of Lok Sabha Elections in Punjab, 1967–2014**

Year	Total Seats	Turn Out	Congress		BJP (1984-)/JNP (1977–80)/BJS (1967–72)		CPI		State Party I			State Party II		
			Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Party	Seats	Votes	Party	Seats	Votes
1967	13	71.13	9	37.31	3	12.49	0	4.28	SAD	1	22.61	ADM	0	4.42
1971	13	59.90	10	45.96	0	4.45	2	6.22	SAD	1	30.85	NCO	0	4.48
1977	13	70.14	0	34.85	3	12.50	0	1.65	SAD	9	42.30	CPM	1	4.94
1980	13	62.65	12	52.45	0	9.97	0	1.27	SAD	1	23.37	INCU	0	2.56
1985	13	67.36	6	41.53	0	3.39	0	3.84	SAD	7	37.17	CPM	0	2.98
1989	13	62.67	2	26.49	0	4.17	0	2.10	SAD (M)	6	29.19	JD	1	5.46
1992	13	23.96	12	49.27	0	16.51	0	1.57	SAD	0	2.58	BSP	1	19.71
1996	13	62.25	2	35.10	0	6.48	0	1.60	SAD	8	28.72	BSP	3	9.35
1998	13	60.07	0	25.85	3	11.67	0	3.40	SAD	8	32.93	BSP	0	12.65
1999	13	56.11	8	38.44	1	9.16	1	3.74	SAD	2	28.59	BSP	0	3.84
2004	13	69.7	2	34.7	3	10.48	0	2.55	SAD	9	34.28	BSP	0	7.65
2009	13	70.6	8	45.23	1	10.6	0	0.33	SAD	4	33.85	BSP	0	5.75
2014	13	70.61	3	33.05	2	8.6	0	—	SAD	4	26.4	AAP	4	24.5

Source: CSDS Data Unit.
Note: In the 1989 elections, one seat was won by the BSP, which secured 8.62 per cent of the vote, while Independents won three seats. In 1998, the Janata Dal won one seat and secured 4.18 per cent of the votes.

Table 2. **Performance of Political Parties in the Assembly Elections in Punjab (1997–2012)**

| | Year of Assembly Elections | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1997 | | | 2002 | | | 2007 | | | 2012 | | |
Party Name	Seats Contested	Won	Votes Polled %	Seats Contested	Won	Votes Polled %	Seats Contested	Won	Votes Polled %	Seats Contested	Won	Votes Polled %
BJP	22	18	8.33	23	3	5.67	23	19	8.28	23	12	7.18
INC	105	14	26.59	105	62	35.81	116	44	40.90	117	46	40.9
BSP	67	1	7.48	100	0	5.69	115	0	4.13	117	0	4.29
CPI	15	2	2.98	11	2	2.15	25	0	0.76	14	0	0.82
SAD	92	75	37.64	92	41	31.08	93	48	37.09	94	56	34.73
IND	244	6	10.87	274	9	11.27	431	5	6.82	418	3	6.75
PPP	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	87	0	5.04

Source: CSDS Data Unit.

into prudent marriage alliances, further reducing scope for subaltern empowerment in electoral terms (A. Kumar, 2014: 344). One possible reason for lack of assertion from below may be acute landlessness among the electorate. Although Dalits constitute 31.94 per cent of the state's population according to the 2011 census, the highest proportion in all Indian states, they own only two per cent of the cultivable land in a state where agriculture has always been the economic mainstay and land ownership underpins rural power structures. Another reason is the Dalits' failure to establish a political platform. The Dalit-based Bahujan Samaj Party, founded by Kanshi Ram, a native of Punjab, after promising beginnings in the 1990s, has failed to take off due to internal factionalism and apathy of its national leadership under Mayawati (see Tables 1 and 2).

So far, there has been no 'silent revolution' of political power in Punjab, despite the state having long witnessed anti-caste Adi Dharam movements and progressive anti-caste arguments from within Sikhism. However, Dalits have recently become culturally assertive, setting up many among the 9000 new spiritual spaces, mainly gurdwaras and deras, all over the state (A. Kumar, 2014: 342) and operating separate cremation grounds (Ram, 2007: 4067). The growing number of Dalits proclaiming themselves as Ad-dharmis or Ravidassias indicates strategies to claim their own cultural and spiritual domains (Ram, 2016; Singh, 2016). Despite unwillingness to share political power, compelled to seek the crucial support of the numerically strong and economically mobile lower-caste voters in a closely contested bi-polar polity with high turnout, the leading political class therefore now faces new pressures. Recourse by SAD to the 'softer' option of cultivating Dalit and other religious institutions to attract voters from the marginal castes (Biaxas, 2007; A. Kumar, 2014; Singh, 2016), however, raises growing concerns about fresh misuse of religion in politics (Lal, 2009).

State-level Electoral Politics: Determining Factors

More than national or external factors, state-specific history and geography have shaped the spatial and social cleavages that inform the electoral politics of Punjab as a borderland state. Partition meant colossal losses for Indian Punjab (like for West Bengal), as it inherited merely 36 per cent of colonial Punjab's land. Post-1966 Punjab is only one-seventh of pre-partition undivided Punjab.[7] In 1947, 80 per cent of the canal-irrigated fertile land along with the cash-rich cotton belt went to Pakistan and Sikhs as a mainly agricultural community lost most of their ancestral/acquired cultivable land. While Punjabis as a whole suffered, a section of Sikh leadership guided by Master Tara Singh argued at the time that the Sikhs as a nation (*quaum*) suffered the most. After 1947, when India's Constituent Assembly rejected Akali demands for continuation of separate communal representation for minorities, this raised anxiety about adequate Sikh representation in legislative bodies. In addition, initially denied on the ground that Sikhism did not recognise caste, Sikh Dalits gained Scheduled Caste status only in 1956 to become eligible for benefits under the state's affirmative

policies. While, after long agitation, the remapping of Punjab in 1966 finally fulfilled demands for a 'Sikh homeland', several unfinished agenda, especially the status of Chandigarh and river water issues, have remained sore points, resurfacing whenever the state faces elections. This explains partly why a sense of victimhood continues to linger in the Sikh community's psyche, expressed in many narratives and contexts. In political discourses, not only radical Sikh outfits like Dal Khalsa, but even moderate Akali Dal leaders make efforts to rekindle such grievances, even as their intensity has considerably decreased.[8]

Apart from territorial boundaries, Punjab's demographic configuration underwent huge changes after the exodus of Muslims in 1947. This influenced electoral politics, as the Hindu population increased from 28 to 64 per cent and Sikhs increased from 13 to 33 per cent (Sarhadi, 1970: 152). While the overall Sikh presence includes a strong Sikh rural majority, there is an 'almost equally strong Hindu urban majority' (Wallace, 1986: 367). In this new situation, 'both the Hindus and Sikhs continued to suffer from a minority persecution complex but with a difference' (P. Kumar, 2014: 223). The inherited sociopolitical system based on landed property relationships from colonial times continues to play a significant role in Punjab's politics. It created the well-known rural–urban divide between Hindus and Sikhs, even as the state urbanises at a rapid pace. Though Punjab has historically been 'a medley of religious, ethnic, linguistic, and caste groups' (P. Kumar, 2014: 220), the colonial administration sought to insulate the rural masses from the urban populace involved in trade, commerce and service sectors, so that nationalist Congress-led forces could not extend their influence to village Punjab. Lack of business and industrial establishment in the state served imperial interests, with rural youth seeing military service as the only viable employment. The prominence of state parties like the Punjab National Unionist Party, a party of the landed peasantry, which won the Assembly elections in 1937 and 1946, confirmed the feudal dominance in rural Punjab, friendly to imperial interests (Ahsan & Desai, 2005: 98; Tanwar, 1999). Punjab's tradition of colonial governance reflected a 'synergy of the authoritarianism of British bureaucrats and the domination of a peasant society by indigenous landlords' (Stern, 2001: 50).

After the mass exodus of Muslims in 1947, Hindus and Sikhs strangely found themselves on opposite sides regarding two politically volatile issues, adoption of Punjabi as the official language of the state, in Gurmukhi script, and the Punjabi Suba demand for a separate state for Punjabi speakers. This affected the relationship of Akali Dal and Congress, which had been cordial earlier, in relation to the gurdwara reform movement, the freedom struggle and opposition to the idea of partition.[9] Despite nationalist efforts to articulate a composite linguistic–cultural consciousness in post-1947 Punjab under the 'Congress system', due to Akali politics, this did not lead to a 'unified sub-nationality with a common political goal' (P. Kumar, 2014: 220).

To understand the way politics of Indian Punjab has evolved, one needs a longer view of the SAD trajectory in all three electoral regions. SAD with some justification has always viewed itself as the 'natural party' of the Sikhs and, along with the SGPC

and Akal Takht, considers itself as the custodian of the community's cultural, religious and political interests. SAD, the oldest state party in India, came into existence on 14 December 1920, following a 175-member SGPC meeting on 15 November 1920 in Amritsar, which decided to establish SAD as an institutional–political arm of the SGPC (Narang, 2014: 339). In its formative years, the party's main agenda was to bring the Sikh gurdwaras and Sikhs under panthic control (Singh, 2005: 32). The party actively focused on leading the Sikh community in efforts to purify its religious arrangements and practices. Under the Government of India Act of 1935, SAD in its political avatar contested the 1937 elections in alliance with Congress, hoping to corner the seats reserved for Sikhs, though without much success. The Unionist Party representing the landed peasantry, with support from both Muslims and Sikhs, bagged 96 out of 175 seats in the Punjab Provincial Legislative Assembly (Kapur, 1986: 52).

In the 1946 elections, however, the Muslim League, which had won only two seats in 1937, gained 75 out of the 85 seats reserved for Muslims, indicating the growing influence of the party's campaign for partition on communal grounds. This deeply changed the political scenario of colonial Punjab. With partition looming, SAD obtained 21 seats, while Congress and the Unionist Party won 51 and 21 seats, respectively. Akalis vehemently opposed the creation of Pakistan, correctly fearing loss of land and forced migration for the sizable Sikh community settled in the canal colonies by the British (Talbot, 1980: 65).

After partition, Akali leaders sought to secure two immediate objectives, an adequate share of political power for Sikhs and promotion of the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script (Grewal, 1998: 74). Refusal of the Constituent Assembly to accept Akali demands for separate communal electorates prompted the long struggle of the Punjabi Suba Movement in the 1950s and 1960s and sowed the seeds for communal politics based on Sikh and Hindu identity. Later, Akali demands for self-determined Sikh political status within the Indian Union must be viewed in this context (Anand, 1976: 263), which is not to say that Sikh identity politics emerged only after partition. When the dominant Hindu majority chose to oppose Akali demands (Brass, 1974: 298, 327), the Hindu–Sikh divide surfaced in conflicting assertions about language and script, with Punjabi now declared as the language of the Sikhs (Sarhadi, 1970: 211). This language controversy became symptomatic of a 'deeper quest for recognition and power' (Deol, 2000: 94) by the Sikhs, led by SAD (Oberoi, 1994: 416). As notions of Punjabi identity (*Punjabiyat)* got inextricably linked to the party's aspiration for a 'territorial homeland' for Sikhs within the Indian Union, party slogans demanded a Punjabi Suba, which further communalised Punjab politics (Lamba, 1999).

Support for SAD came mainly from Sikh farmers and rural Punjab. This trend continues, as revealed in CSDS-NES survey data, according to which a sample survey of SAD party activists in 2004 showed that 85 per cent were Sikhs, mostly farmers. Unsurprisingly, in the Assembly elections from 1967 to 2007, SAD has had a clear edge in 28 of the state's rural Assembly constituencies (P. Kumar, 2014: 226).[10] Yet, like other religious communities in India, Sikhs are not a homogeneous group.

Telford (1992: 986) highlights that '[o]ver the last 100 years, the Sikh community has exhibited cleavages along at least four lines: (1) different visions of the nation, (2) class, (3) region, and (4) leadership rivalry'. Differences along class, caste and regional lines have increased through the Green Revolution (Puri, 1981: 49). Until the 1950s, SAD leaders like Master Tara Singh, an urban-based upper caste Khatri, had come mainly from urban upper-caste and middle-class Sikhs. Change in the party leadership profile occurred when Sant Fateh Singh, a Jat Sikh, replaced him (Bajwa, 1979: 25; A. Kumar, 2014: 338), also leading a gradual shift of the Akali leadership base from the Doaba and Majha regions to Malwa (Sharma, 1986: 650–51). While the Congress leadership in post-partition Punjab has come from all three regions, like for SAD the party leadership has mainly remained with Jat Sikhs; except Zail Singh, all Congress chief ministers have been Jat Sikhs.

Three factors explain the Jat Sikhs' ascendance as the politically and economically most powerful community in post-partition Punjab. First, the community owns the largest share of land and capital-intensive and market-oriented Green Revolution policies with their 'betting on the strong' approach benefitted landholding Jats the most. The capitalist transition of the agrarian mode of production led to a discourse that 'celebrated the Jatness of Sikh farmers and in many ways helped them capture the centre stage of the social and political life in the state' (Jodhka, 1997: 279). Second, Jats are numerically the largest community in post-1966 Punjab. Third, the Jat community is considered an elite caste, despite not being 'twice-born'. Jat Sikh dominance in Punjab's lopsided politics is also reflected in the sociological origins of state legislators. Of 1,248 Legislative Assembly members elected between 1967 and 2012, 44 per cent were Jat Sikhs, whereas upper-caste Khatris and Aroras, mostly Hindus but also Sikhs, constituted 22 per cent. Jat Sikh dominance has considerably weakened the political role of lower castes among Sikhs, including Dalit castes (Jodhka, 2000b: 392; Kumar & Sharma, 2009). Under a system of reservations for Scheduled Castes, though, Dalit representation remains somewhat assured. Presently, 34 out of the 117 Assembly seats are reserved, earlier 29 seats. However, Scheduled Caste candidates have not been able to win from unreserved seats, nor have the main parties, including Akali Dal, shown keenness to allot tickets to them (P. Kumar, 2014: 307).

Party Political and Ethnic–Religious Struggles

The prolonged bitter struggle over linguistic issues and the creation of Punjabi Suba helped SAD to emerge as the main competitor of Congress in post-partition Punjab (Kapur, 1986: 216). However, Akali leaders realised quickly that it would be difficult to retain power by itself. Congress, with its image of a secular umbrella party, successfully claimed to represent both Hindus and Sikhs and held the middle ground in efforts to 'cut off the support base of all other political parties, instead of seeking to accommodate them' (Sharma, 1986: 640). In the first three Punjab Assembly elections, Congress won around 60 per cent of the vote (see Table 2). SAD efforts to mobilise support for

Punjabi Suba only resulted in 19 seats in the 1952 Assembly elections, with merely 11.7 per cent of the vote. In the 1957 elections, a desperate Akali Dal merged with Congress, hoping that the Congress government in Delhi would allow demands for Punjabi Suba. The Congress state government of Pratap Singh Kairon (1956–64), however, did not pursue this demand, while Nehru, then India's Prime Minister, opposed this demand, which he considered communal and potentially secessionist in nature. Indeed, King (1997: 119) confirms that Sikhs had wanted 'Sikhistan'. Post-1957 dejected Akalis decided to resurrect their party. However, many Akali MLAs as part of the Congress government refused to resign and rejoin the parent party. As a result, a much-weakened and under-prepared SAD fared badly in the 1962 Assembly elections. Significantly, the growing Hindu–Sikh divide over Punjabi Suba helped the BJS, a party capitalising on urban Hindu sentiments, to win nine seats in 1962, up from two in 1952.

Assembly elections just after the reorganisation in 1967 provided an early indication about continuation of the simmering rural–urban, regional, religious and caste divide of Punjab's electoral choices. Significantly, SAD failed to form a government on its own. The cross-communal and spatial social bases of Congress were strongly in evidence and it even got more Sikh candidates elected than SAD. The electoral support of sizable Dalit groups with different religious allegiance remained uncertain. To compound the party's problems, endemic internal conflicts over strategy and tactics as well as leadership issues arose. To seek Hindu electoral support, SAD with its tag of being a panthic party led by Jat Sikhs had to enter electoral alliances with other political parties (Deol, 2000: 100). In the 1969 and 1977 Assembly elections, Akali Dal won 43 and 58 seats respectively, an improvement mainly due to its electoral alliance with the BJS (BJP since 1980). This ally, viewed as supportive of Hindu trading and business class interests, secured urban Hindu votes for SAD. While anti-Congressism and a complementary social support base made these two parties natural allies, deep-rooted ideological and programmatic divisions between BJS and SAD remained apparent, particularly as BJS, under Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) influence, regarded Sikhs as part of larger Hindu society (Brass, 1974: 333). To sustain their partnership, SAD and BJS even agreed to tackle their differences over language issues. Their coalition government adopted a three-language policy in July 1969, under which Punjabi became the sole medium of instruction in government schools, whereas Hindi and English became second and third languages, respectively, implemented from class 4 and 6 onwards (Brass, 1974: 343).

The steamroller majority of Congress in the 1972 Assembly elections, riding on the 'Indira wave', made SAD realise the necessity to retain the core constituency support of rural Sikhs and to create pre-electoral alliances with non-Congress parties, albeit as the dominant partner. The subsequent SAD–Janata Party victory in 1977 was, however, also due to electoral support for both parties' role in resisting Indira Gandhi's emergency. SAD cadres contributed significantly in efforts to oppose the emergency, a fact that is not often highlighted (Singh, 2014). Notably, even while Congress was reeling under

post-emergency blues and got merely 17 seats in 1977, it still polled 33.6 per cent of the vote, higher than Akali Dal's 31.4 per cent. This confirmed a stable core support for Congress across all three regions in rural and urban Punjab and among Hindus and Sikhs as compared to the Akali rural Sikh peasantry support base (Verma, 1998). Hence, there has never been a whitewash of either SAD or Congress, even when elections have been plebiscitary in nature, like in 1977 (Singh, 1978; Wallace, 1980), or after the Longowal–Rajiv Gandhi Accord in 1985, a development underlining the intense campaigning, high turnout, close contests and high volatility in subsequent elections in Punjab (see Tables 1 and 2 above).

Disastrous Punjab Demands for More Autonomy and the Turnaround

Arguably, SAD's need to consolidate the Sikh majority vote tempted it to raise further demands for Punjab's autonomy (Kapur, 1986; Malik, 1986), with a segment of Akali leadership even extending support to extremist hardliners who demanded an independent state of Khalistan. These autonomist politics, however, 'ended without achieving anything at all in political terms' (Jodhka, 1997: 273; see also Verma, 1999: 3531). Repeated interference by the centre in Punjab's affairs poisoned the state's political atmosphere (Sharma, 1986: 635). Disastrous developments ensued when the personalised, centralising politics of Indira Gandhi viewed state parties as a threat to national unity and tried to manage the ethnic conflict from above without involving the state-based leadership even of her own party. While older state parties, such as SAD, NC and DMK, came under attack, attempts to stifle local voices in Punjab generated radicalised anti-federal sentiments within SAD. Reeling under unfair treatment by the centre, SAD leaders voiced their grievances through the Anandpur Sahib Resolution of 1973, which contained the core Akali demands regarding political, economic and social relationships between the centre and Punjab, incorporating seven major objectives (Singh, 1981: 346). These wide-ranging demands included prominently transfer of the federally administered city of Chandigarh to Punjab, readjustment of state boundaries to include certain Sikh majority Punjabi-speaking territory, introduction of land reforms as well as subsidies and loans for farmers, measures to promote heavy industrialisation in Punjab, enactment of an all-India Gurdwara Act and reversal of the new recruitment policy at the centre, under which recruitment quotas for Sikhs in the armed forces fell from 20 per cent to 2 per cent (Kumar, 2004; Singh, 2005: 111–25). Two new demands, added in 1978, concerned objections to allocation of available river waters of Punjab to neighbouring states, an issue that, like Chandigarh's status, refuses to go away (Pettigrew, 1995: 5).

Repeated failures in negotiations with the centre after October 1981 led to intensification of Akali agitation and armed militancy, supported by radical Akali elements, the Sikh diaspora as well as Pakistan. The escalating ethnic violence and the centre's 'complete mishandling' (Jodhka, 2000a: 881) of the crisis ultimately brought the catastrophic military action known as Operation Bluestar, followed by

Operation Woodrose, a search operation in Punjab villages by the Army to arrest militants. While militancy in Punjab received further impetus after these repressive acts (Van Dyke, 2009), anti-Sikh riots in Delhi and other parts of India after Indira Gandhi was assassinated on 31 October 1984 by Sikh guards accentuated the alienation of the Sikh community, especially as the accused remained unpunished.

Post-Bluestar, one witnessed the ascendancy of radical autonomist forces, while moderate Akalis lost credibility and legitimacy. Moderate Akali leaders attempted to save Punjab from rising religious fundamentalism and militancy through the Rajiv Gandhi–Sant Longowal Accord on 24 July 1985. After winning the elections on 25 September 1985, the SAD government of Surjit Singh Barnala was, however, unable to make the Congress-ruled centre, then under Rajiv Gandhi, agree to fulfil any of the promises under the Accord. Afraid of losing votes in neighbouring Hindi-speaking states, Congress faced pressure from hardliners, especially after Sant Longowal's assassination. While the Barnala-led SAD government seemed ineffective, pro-militant organisations formed the United Akali Dal. Targeted killings of Hindu civilians by militants further weakened the government, while human rights violations by the state police caused fresh outrage. State police action in April 1986 to flush out the Sikh militants from the Golden Temple premises under operation Black Thunder saw the desertion of several factions from SAD and the government. After dismissing the Barnala government, President's Rule, imposed under Article 356 of the Constitution in Punjab in May 1987, on the eve of the Haryana Assembly elections, remained in force for almost five years. During this turbulent period, SAD came under the firm control of militants. The complete marginalisation of the two moderate Akali Dal factions led by P.S. Badal and S.S. Barnala was evident when, in the 1989 elections, these two factions managed to obtain only 6.65 per cent of the votes and could not win a single seat. Arguably, a significant segment of the party's core voting constituency had shifted loyalty to ultra-radicals, albeit temporarily (Singh, 2007). Significantly, Congress, dubbed as 'Hindu party' after the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, also became irrelevant in state politics.

The turnaround came only in the mid-1990 when normal politics returned after the cessation of militancy. The healing process started with holding Assembly elections in 1992, despite threats by militants and a boycott by SAD, then still under the influence of radicals. Polling was just over 20 per cent. However, the Congress government elected, led by Beant Singh, managed to flush out militancy, mainly through the Punjab police, led first by Julio Riberio and then K.P.S. Gill, himself a Jat Sikh. It helped that the militants had by then lost whatever sympathy they had among the masses, due to their criminal and immoral acts. Even following Beant Singh's assassination in August 1995 by a suicide bomber, militancy could not return. Elections for Panchayati Raj institutions and municipalities in 1995 witnessed a massive 82 per cent voter turnout, marking the return of competitive politics (Verma, 1995: 1325). Desperately attempting to keep the upper hand, the radicals formed SAD (United) in 1994, including six separatist factions of Akali Dal, yet the moderate faction under P.S. Badal emerged as dominant, in due course integrating almost all radical constituents.

Typical of the party's faction-ridden history, even after winning the 1997 elections in alliance with the BJP, SAD then underwent a split before the 1999 parliamentary elections. This happened when G.S. Tohra, SGPC President for close to two decades, revolted against Badal and formed an electoral alliance with other Akali factions such as SAD (Amritsar). The latter still survives, led by its founder Simranjit Singh Mann. This partly explains why, despite securing a majority on its own in the 1997 Assembly elections, SAD chose to have a coalition government with the BJP. It attempted not only to sustain this mutually beneficial alliance in the long term, but sought to shed the panthic image of SAD. Moreover, meanwhile the BJP had emerged as a national party and with the advent of the coalition era, SAD hoped to get a share in political power at the centre. Most importantly, SAD under Badal was concerned to pursue an agenda of Hindu–Sikh unity and peace instead of ethno-religious strife (Kumar & Kumar, 2002). When different SAD factions fought the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections separately in 1999 and 2002, this contributed to the electoral success of Congress especially in the 2002 Assembly elections, providing important lessons to the SAD leadership.

Significantly, even the emergence of shrill Hindutva politics in the 1990s, more strident in recent years, has not made SAD go back to its earlier ethnic and autonomy-focused agenda. Apart from Badal's moderating influence, this is also due to SAD's electoral compulsion to remain aligned with the BJP and grim realisation that reviving radical politics would spell doom for the moderate leadership (Jodhka, 2000a; Verma, 1999)**.** Singh (1997: 275) observes that political realists within SAD 'seem to have calculated that their mutual cooperation provides the maximum scope for preserving Sikh identity and, indeed, advancing the agenda for political autonomy'. One constant theme in the SAD–BJP common minimum programmes has been to secure 'peace, brotherhood, and communal harmony', reminiscent of the common programme for the earlier SAD–BJS coalition government (Singh, 1981: 103–04). The emergence of state parties and the formation of coalition governments at the centre since 1991, involving both national and state parties, and including SAD as a constituent of successive NDA governments of Vajpayee and Modi, seem to have brought a further turnaround in Akali mindsets. Moreover, the state's dire financial situation, which has continued to worsen as Punjab's debts keep mounting due to huge subsidies given unscrupulously with an eye on the polling booth, also compel SAD leaders to seek cooperation with the centre.

A Fresh Beginning?

Post-1997 Punjab has witnessed the rise of person-centric leadership within SAD as Badal and his close relatives have exercised control over both party and government, while SGPC and Akal Takht autonomy have been badly eroded. In people's perception, SGPC has become a source of funding for the party, with huge donations coming to gurdwaras under its control. Akal Takht moral authority over Sikhs has been badly damaged and both institutions are popularly perceived as instruments of SAD

leadership for settling scores with political opponents (A. Kumar, 2014). Sadly, once a cadre-based and ideologically driven movement party, SAD itself has now been reduced to a 'family party', following the tradition of most other distinctive state-level parties. SAD has also been 'mainstreamed' in national politics.[11]

Reflecting a major shift in Punjab's electoral politics, secular core issues of governance and development are now dominant for SAD and other mainstream parties, visible in manifestos and campaign speeches, though not much has happened at ground level (Kumar & Kumar, 2002: 1385). Among the post-Bluestar generation of voters and leadership, there is little memory of the gruesome events in Punjab during militancy. The older leadership realises that resorting to panthic politics, although core Anandpur Sahib Resolution demands remain unmet, would be suicidal for all stakeholders. The volatile political scenario can quickly change, especially if the SAD–BJP alliance collapses, as speculated after the BJP's 2014 electoral Lok Sabha success, followed by BJP winning the Assembly elections in neighbouring Haryana. While recent BJP electoral reverses in Delhi and Bihar have put a spanner to such thoughts, Punjab's BJP state unit would surely look for a greater number of seats to contest in future elections. Presently, it has been allotted merely four out of 13 Parliamentary seats to contest, whereas in Assembly elections, the party gets to contest 23 out of 117 seats. Viewed as an ineffective junior ally in the coalition government, BJP has not gained much from this electoral alliance and seems unable to benefit from its traditional urban social constituency of trading and business groups. The BJP state unit, moreover, has been forced to underplay its ideological thrust, potentially further alienating its core supporters, while Akali Dal has largely managed to retain its panthic support base.[12] Conscious of a possible future break-up of this alliance, and given SAD's natural desire to emerge as a single majority party in the state, there have been consistent SAD efforts to expand its support base, especially since Sukhbir Singh Badal's ascendancy as the president of the party.[13]

In this regard, it is significant that SAD has recently been instrumental in constructing cultural heritage buildings, mainly connected with Sikh religious figures. It also seems to engage more with the numerous Dalit voters, launching special welfare schemes for them (A. Kumar, 2014; Singh, 2016). The party has given tickets to urban caste-Hindu candidates in the last two Assembly elections and included them in the party organisational set-up. Realising that Punjab has been urbanising at a rapid pace, SAD has made some efforts to present an all-inclusive agenda, targeting urban Punjab and the middle classes living there. Since the 2008 local bodies' elections, SAD has also been showing inclination to fight more and more urban bodies' elections, even to the extent of annoying its electoral ally.

The unexpected emergence of the AAP in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections now puts a huge question mark over the longevity of Punjab's bipolar system, especially as both SAD and Congress cannot absolve themselves of responsibility for bringing Punjab to its current sorry state of affairs. The two parties were unable to negotiate the grievances connected to militancy and have been unable to tackle the problems

of a structural crisis in the agricultural sector. After three full terms in power in Punjab, and being part of coalition governments at the centre, SAD can no longer simply highlight the past wrongs of Congress and harp on about step-motherly treatment meted out by the centre. Major complaints relate to huge unemployment, a politicised administration, rampant mafia-style corruption, massive drug addiction and heinous violent crimes. Promises made of diversification of agriculture, a second green revolution and agro-based industrialisation have remained confined to successive manifestos. While farmer suicides appear in the news and industries that shifted away during militancy are not returning, both SAD and Congress face anti-incumbency effects. This disenchantment among the wider electorates for the SAD–BJP combine and past and present Congress regimes, it seems, has enabled AAP to benefit from double anti-incumbency in the state.

Conclusions

This article has illustrated the pivotal role of SAD in determining Punjab politics and the various challenges that the party has encountered and continues to face. There is now a growing question mark over the party's ability to continue its domination. Under current trends, the state seems to be heading towards a serious triangular electoral contest in 2017, with AAP emerging as the third credible alternative. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, four out of the 13 Lok Sabha seats were won by AAP (see Table 1), and this barely two-year-old party making its debut finished third in another eight constituencies. Viewed in terms of the Assembly segments, the party polled more votes than any other party in 34 out of the 117 constituencies. In light of such results, the Assembly elections in 2017 are going to be most intriguing. The AAP central leadership still has to strengthen its organisation at the state level and needs to establish a state-level leadership. If that happens, the 2017 Assembly elections, like the ones in 1997, could very well become a game changer, heralding a new and hopefully positive phase in Punjab's politics.

   The analysis presented here predicts that future electoral contests could well be a tripartite contest rather than the tired dualistic constellation. It also suggests, however, that changing expectations of people in Punjab from the state and governance are evolving, now more obviously focused on agenda of 'good governance', even though this remains at the level of rhetoric. Rather than earlier reliance on specific core issues of religion, region, language, script and identity, key expectations relate to more effective maintenance of public order, better infrastructure and less corruption among those who claim to be acting as elected representatives. However, the political leadership across the parties still also has to learn that while identity politics based on ethnic-regional communal divides have receded into the background and caste-/class-based identities are coming to the fore, the concerns of Punjab's large and partly upwardly mobile lower caste population have to be addressed by all main contenders for votes.

Notes

1. Other cases of state-level parties would be the National Conference (NC) in Jammu & Kashmir and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu.
2. While asked to prioritise their loyalty in the National Election Studies (NES) conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi in 1996 and 1999, 53 and 51 per cent of the respondents, respectively, expressed their first loyalty to the region/state they belonged to.
3. The Malwa region has 69 assembly seats, followed by Majha (25 seats) and Doaba (23 seats) after the fourth delimitation exercise in 2009. Unsurprisingly, all chief ministers in post-1966 Punjab have come from the Malwa region.
4. Interestingly, SAD and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) have an electoral alliance in Haryana and the two state-level party leaders campaign together in each other's states (see note 13).
5. Voting percentages in the Assembly elections of post-1966 reorganised Punjab were, respectively, 71.18 (1967), 72.27 (1969), 68.63 (1972), 65.36 (1977), 64.33 (1980), 67.47 (1985), 23.82 (1992), 68.73 (1997), 62.14 (2002), 75.36 (2007) and 78.6 (2012). The 1992 elections saw exceptionally low participation due to Akali boycotts and threats by militants. Significantly, in the last two Assembly elections, women's turnout has been higher than that of men.
6. Thirty-nine Scheduled Castes constitute 31.94 per cent of the state's population. However, the Scheduled Castes are divided not only along lines of caste but also religion, resulting in 'absence of any visible pattern in their voting behaviour' (Judge, 2012: 18). Ram (2016: 371) notes that 60 per cent of Dalits are Sikhs, whereas the rest are Hindus and there are tiny segments of Christians. The two most numerous castes, Chamars and Balmikis, have either remained Hindu or identify today as Ravidassias or Ad-dharmis (Singh, 2016).
7. In 1948, merging the seven princely states of Patiala, Nabha, Jind, Kapurthala, Malerkotla, Faridkot and Kalsia created the Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU). This was then merged with Punjab in 1956, while some northern districts of Punjab and several princely states in the Kangra valley were combined into the Union Territory of Himachal Pradesh. A third phase created the separate state of Haryana on 1 November 1966 by carving out Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab.
8. This recent past of the Sikhs, a past heavy with blood and sacrifice, is narrated through popular history using religious texts, local sayings and proverbs, and calendars and other illustrations sold in bazaars (Jeffrey, 1987: 59–62).
9. The SAD–Congress split came soon after the Legislative Assembly elections in 1937, with Congress opposing the induction of Indians by the British in World War II.
10. The fourth delimitation exercise in 2009 (see note 3) made major territorial changes for both Assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies.
11. Notably, the present SAD Constitution articulates the party's aims and objects explicitly in India's federal context: 'To safeguard the fundamental rights of the religious and linguistic minorities, to fulfill the demands of the democratic traditions and to pave the way for economic progress it has become imperative that the Indian constitutional structure be given a real federal shape.' URL (consulted 27 August 2016), from http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/misPolitical_Parties/Constitution_of_Political_Parties/Constitution_of_SAD.pdf

12. SAD still takes a strident position when it comes to panthic issues. Recently, the party has resisted the Haryana government decision to allow the Haryana SGPC to take control of Gurdwaras in Haryana.
13. In 2014, SAD won for the first time an Assembly seat in Haryana, contesting in alliance with INLD and in opposition to the BJP. It also registered victory for the first time in Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee elections in 2013 and has now decided to contest the 2017 elections in Uttar Pradesh in constituencies with considerable Sikh and Punjabi electorates, alone or in alliance with 'like-minded parties'.

References

Ahsan, Aitzaz & Desai, Meghnad (2005) *Divided by Democracy*. Delhi: Roli Books.

Ahuja, Amit & Chhibber, Pradeep (2012) 'Why the Poor Vote in India: If I Don't Vote, I Am Dead to the State', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 47(4): 389–410.

Anand, J.C. (1976) 'Punjab: Politics of Retreating Communalism'. In Iqbal Narain (Ed.), *State Politics in India* (pp. 262–98). New Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan.

Bajwa, Harcharan Singh (1979) *Fifty Years of Punjab Politics (1920–1970)*. Chandigarh: Modem Publishers.

Benbabaali, Dalel (2016) 'From the Peasant Armed Struggle to the Telangana State: Changes and Continuities in a South Indian Region's Uprising', *Contemporary South Asia*, 24(2): 184–96.

Biaxas, Lionel (2007) 'The Dera Sacha Sauda Controversy and Beyond', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(40): 4059–65.

Brass, Paul (1974) *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chandra, Kanchan (2004) *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Deol, Harnik (2000) *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of Punjab*. London: Routledge.

Grewal, J.S. (1998) 'Sikh Identity, the Akalis and Khalistan'. In J.S. Grewal & Indu Banga (Eds), *Punjab in Prosperity and Violence* (pp. 65–103). New Delhi: K.K. Publishers.

Jaffrelot, Christophe (2003) *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of Low Castes in North Indian Politics*. Delhi: Permanent Black.

Jeffrey, Robin (1987) 'Grappling with History: Sikh Politicians and the Past', *Pacific Affairs*, 60(1): 59–72.

Jodhka, Surinder S. (1997) '"Crisis" of the 1980s and Changing Agenda of "Punjab Studies": A Survey of Some Recent Research', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32(6): 273–79.

———— (2000a) 'Decline of Identity Politics', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35(11): 880–82.

———— (2000b) 'Prejudice without Pollution? Scheduled Castes in Contemporary Punjab', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy*, 12(3–4): 381–404.

Judge, Paramjit S. (2012) 'Punjab Elections: Entrenching Akali Dominance', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(13): 17–20.

Kapur, Rajiv A. (1986) *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*. London: Allen and Unwin.

King, R.D. (1997) *Nehru and the Language Politics of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Kumar, Ashutosh (2004) 'Electoral Politics in Punjab: Study of Akali Dal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(14–15): 1515–20.

———— (2014) 'Deras as Sites of Electoral Mobilisation in Indian Punjab: Examining the Reasons that Political Parties Flock to the Deras', *Asian Ethnicity*, 15(3): 335–50.

Kumar, A. & Kumar, Sanjay (2002) 'Punjab Assembly Elections: Decline of Identity Politics', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(15): 1384–8.

Kumar, A. & Sharma, T.R. (2009) 'Legislative Elite in Punjab: A Socio-political Study'. In Christophe Jaffrelot & Sanjay Kumar (Eds), *Rise of the Plebeians? The Changing Face of Indian Legislative Assemblies* (pp. 151–63). New Delhi: Routledge.

Kumar, Pramod (2014) 'Coalition Politics in Punjab: From Communal Polarisation to Catch-all Parties?' In E. Sridharan (Ed.), *Coalition Politics in India: Selected Issues at the Centre and the States* (pp. 219–316). New Delhi: Academic Foundation.

Lal, Madan (2009) 'Gurudom: The Political Dimensions of Religious Sects in the Punjab', *South Asia Research*, 29(3): 223–34.

Lamba, G.K. (1999) *Dynamics of Punjabi Suba Movement*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep.

Malik, Yogendra K. (1986) 'The Akali Party and Sikh Militancy', *Asian Survey*, 26(3): 345–62.

Narang, Amarjit Singh (2014) 'The Shiromani Akali Dal'. In Pasaura Singh & Louis E. French (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* (pp. 339–49). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oberoi, Harjot (1994) *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Traditio*n. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Pai, Sudha (2000) *State Politics: New Dimensions*. New Delhi: Shipra.

Pettigrew, J.J.M. (1995) *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*. London: Zed Books.

Puri, Harish K. (1981) 'Akali Politics: Emerging Compulsions'. In Paul Wallace & Surendra Chopra (Eds), *Political Dynamics of Punjab* (pp. 33–51). Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press.

Ram, Ronki (2007) 'Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 42(40): 4066–74.

———— (2016) 'Religion, Identity and Empowerment: The Making of Ravidassia Dharm (Dalit Religion) in Contemporary Punjab'. In Knut A. Jacobsen (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary India* (pp. 371–83). London: Routledge.

Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber & Rudolph, Lloyd I. (2008) 'Congress Learns to Lose: From a One-party Dominant to a Multiparty System in India'. In Edward Friedman & Joseph Wong (Eds), *Political Transitions in Dominant Party Systems: Learning to Lose* (pp. 15–41). London: Routledge.

Sarhadi, Ajit Singh (1970) *Punjabi Suba: The Story of the Struggle*. Delhi: U. B. Kapoor and Sons.

Sharma, T.R. (1986) 'Diffusion and Accommodation: The Contending Strategies of the Congress Party and Akali Dal in Punjab', *Pacific Affairs*, 59(4): 634–54.

Singh, Ajit (2005) *Shiromani Akali Dal Religio-political Study (1947–90)*. Kapurthala: Arman.

Singh, Dalip (1978) 'Sixth Lok Sabha Elections in Punjab: A New Dimension in State Politics', *The Indian Journal of Political Science,* 39(2): 210–27.

———— (1981) *Dynamics of Punjab Politics*. New Delhi: Macmillan India.

Singh, Gurharpal (1997) 'The Punjab Legislative Assembly Elections of February 1997: The BJP's Regional Road to Power?', *Contemporary South Asia*, 6(3): 273–83.

Singh, Pritam (2007) 'The Political Economy of the Cycles of Violence and Non-violence in the Sikh Struggle for Identity and Political Power: Implications for Indian Federalism', *Third World Quarterly*, 28(3): 555–70.

———— (2014) 'Class, Nation and Religion: Changing Nature of Akali Dal Politics in Punjab, India', *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 52(1): 55–77.

Singh, Surinder (2016) 'Dalits in Punjab: Cultural Assertion and Heritage Reconstruction', *South Asia Research*, 36(3): 356–76.

Sridharan, E. (2014) 'National and State Coalitions in India: Theory and Comparison'. In E. Sridharan (Ed.), *Coalition Politics in India: Selected Issues at the Centre and the States* (pp. 23–34). New Delhi: Academic Foundation.

Stern, Robert W. (2001) *Democracy and Dictatorship in South Asia: Dominant Classes and Political Outcomes in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Talbot, Ian A. (1980) 'The 1946 Punjab Elections', *Modern Asian Studies,* 14(1): 65–91.

Tanwar, Raghuvendra (1999) *Politics of Sharing Power: The Punjab Unionist Party, 1923–1947*. Delhi: Manohar.

Telford, Hamish (1992) 'The Political Economy of Punjab: Creating Space for Sikh Militancy', *Asian Survey,* 32(11): 969–87.

Van Dyke, Virginia (2009) 'The Khalistan Movement in Punjab, India, and the Post-militancy Era', *Asian Survey*, 49(6): 975–97.

Verma, P.S. (1995) 'Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Elections in Punjab. Revival of Political Activity', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(22): 1321–5.

———— (1998) 'The Punjab Congress'. In J.S. Grewal & Indu Banga (Eds), *Punjab in Prosperity and Violence* (pp. 27–64). New Delhi: K.K. Publishers.

———— (1999) 'Akali-BJP Debacle in Punjab. Wages of Non-performance and Fragmentation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(50): 3519–31.

Wallace, Paul (1980) 'Plebiscitary Politics in India's 1980 Parliamentary Elections: Punjab and Haryana', *Asian Survey*, 20(6): 617–33.

———— (1986) 'The Sikhs as a "Minority" in a Sikh Majority State in India', *Asian Survey*, 26(3): 363–77.

Wyatt, Andrew (2010) *Party System Change in South India: Political Entrepreneurs, Patterns and Processes*. London: Routledge.

Yadav, Yogendra (1996) 'Reconfiguration in Indian Politics: State Assembly Elections, 1993–95', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 31(2–3): 95–104.

Yadav, Yogendra & Palshikar, Suhas (2008) 'Ten Theses on State Politics in India', *Seminar*. URL (consulted 19 September 2016), from http://www.india-seminar.com/2008/591/591_y_yadav_&_s_palshkar.htm

Ashutosh Kumar is a Professor in the Department of Political Science at Panjab University in Chandigarh. He wishes to acknowledge that the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi (grant number F. No. 02/144/2011/RPR) supported the present work.

Address: Department of Political Science, Arts Block-4, Panjab University, Chandigarh 160014, India. [e-mail: ashutosh_chd@hotmail.com]